



Read My Lips, Challenges Kevin; Clyde and Matilda Spout Vedanta as Rameshwaram is Deluged In Laughter



Chinmaya Rameshwaram was the scene of laughter and mirth on the evenings of Nov.5 and 6 when the annual fundraiser, ‘Sevanjali’ was held. Famed ventriloquist Kevin Johnson was a runaway smash hit as he regaled the families of Chinmaya Mission Los Angeles with his humorous take on various subjects.

What brought the house down though were the Vedanta-centric gags! Johnson had taken time to understand his material which was given to him by Swami Ishwarananda. Based on the *Mundaka Upanishad*, Swamiji crafted a script on the joys and sorrows of *samsara* and the way the *jiva* can remain untouched by the vagaries of life.

In his speech, Swamiji quoting from the text spoke of the two birds perched on the same tree where, while one tastes the bitter and sweet fruits of the tree, the other just watches. Similarly, the individual Self and the immortal Self behave differently. The



former tastes the sweet and bitter fruits of everyday life; the latter, tasting neither, just observes. Swamiji had Johnson performing to this idea, and effectively conveying the understanding that balance is acquired only with identification with the Self, or *atman*.

Giving it a contemporary Indian-American slant, the ventriloquist accompanied by his feathered friends, Clyde the Buzzard and Matilda the Cockatoo, made a fine impression on the audience. His mastery was such, that even those sitting close to the stage could not see the ventriloquist’s lips move.

The show was peppered with speeches by CMLA members. Shashi Acharya, a member of CMLA’s board as well as the Foundation Committee, explained to the audience the income and expenditure of the mission. He thanked all present for their support of CMLA which he assured would only go toward enhancing services already offered to the community. Ashwin Rangan also of the Foundation Committee, expressed similar sentiments pointing out that CMLA was for all to avail of as well as a forum to contribute and enhance it with their skills and talent.



Lalita Bala narrated her experience as a balavihar parent and the impact that the program has had on her family. She said that the efficacy of balavihar was clear from the influence it still exerted on her children, now in college. The mission had become a very important part in all their lives, she said, and it had propelled her to serve on the Foundation Committee.

Acharya Mahadevanji in his speech, acknowledged individuals for their continuing support of CMLA over the past several years. He also took time to recognize the immense seva done by volunteers: ticketing, working the phones to get pledges, decorating, food and the myriad other tasks that need to be done to get an event off the ground.

Johnson wound down each evening’s program, which in all saw over 750 people gather and raise sufficient funds to sustain all ongoing projects, with a scene from ‘Godzilla’ getting squeals out of the kids and “oohs” and “aahs” from the adults.

Indeed, the children seemed to enjoy the event as much as the adults, lining up later for pictures and autographs from Johnson. The crowd friendly performer obliged each with their requests and threw in a warm smile!

All attendees were served a boxed dinner.



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